Awareness as an Indicator of Success in a Study Abroad Preparation Program

Thomas LEGGE
Adrian WAGNER

Abstract

Programs to encourage Japanese students to conduct part of their university education overseas have become increasingly popular in Japan in recent years, as part of a wider effort for Japan to play a bigger role in a modern, globalised world. However, students at Japanese universities often lack the requisite English-language skills to participate in these programs and those that manage to secure places often encounter a university learning environment that is very different from what they were used to in Japan.

Within the confines of a university program aimed at students undertaking long term study abroad, this paper sought to measure students' awareness in terms of the realities of studying in a foreign country, their ability to reflect on a shorter study-abroad experience and also their English-language strengths and weaknesses. We tried to identify whether there was indeed a link be-

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tween higher levels of awareness and those who went on to study abroad.

We collated and quantified data from 17 students by using a questionnaire, with subsequent interviews with students being incorporated to contextualise some of the responses. The data collected indicated that students who achieved study abroad places were more aware than students who did not and that this small-scale initial study provided the necessary basis on which to conduct further research.

Introduction

University students require a lot of independent study in order to achieve above the norm and, with relatively few contact teaching hours and students having more individual freedom than at any other point in their lives, it can be difficult for educators to adequately keep track of their progress. This is especially true in Japan when compared with the more active role that the teacher plays in the academic (and often beyond) lives of students in primary and secondary education.

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that university students in Japan still tend to expect teachers to spoon feed them with what they need to know to pass their exams, much in the way that they were accustomed to at primary and secondary school. In many respects, students expect to be guided and coached but the opportunity to do this is usually logistically difficult within the university setting where contact hours are fewer and teachers are responsible for a much greater number of students. As a result of this fact, we were interested in ways of generating more autonomous learning and reflection in our university students.

A catalyst for undertaking this specific research was the shared observation

at an early stage of this iteration of the Super Global Program (SGP), a special study abroad program at our university, that some students appeared to have a reasonably clear idea of what they wanted to achieve from it, whereas others, who were perhaps more typical of Japanese students we have observed, did not. That is to say that some students had clear intentions to study abroad at a particular university and to follow a particular course, while others appeared to have put little thought into anything beyond improving their English.

Having decided to examine this in more detail, we felt that the most effective way of building on these initial observations was through the use of questionnaires and interviews. We thought that might help us to understand better the qualities demonstrated by more successful students, and that this would enable us to improve the course and increase the number of participating students who could successfully go on to study abroad in future years.

As we read through the questionnaires and interview notes, we noticed a clear difference in the quality of responses but struggled to find a word that could adequately describe what we were seeing. We considered applying terms such as *consciousness* or *engagement* as well as analyzing our data through the more established fields of Motivation or Learner Autonomy but found none of these satisfactory.

Finally, we settled on the term *awareness*. We felt that measuring the awareness levels of the students was a convenient cover-all term that could convey their effort and engagement with the program and was more suited to both the data we had captured and our overall purposes.

To clarify, we use the term *awareness* in this study not in the sense of second language acquisition researchers such as Schmidt (2010) who apply the term as part of *The Noticing Hypothesis* but as a distinct construct most

suitable for our own purposes, drawing on elements of both motivation and autonomy. We hope that, in doing so, we are able to give a clear picture of our findings.

The Structure of the Super Global Program

This research was carried out during the 2018 Fall Semester at a private university in Osaka, Japan. The students are all first-year university students belonging to the second intake of the SGP which began in 2017. The SGP is a credit-bearing program open to students who wish to undertake 長期派遣留学 (chōkihakenryūgaku) or long-term study abroad. This entails spending a year as an exchange student at an overseas university studying predominantly within a faculty (as opposed to simply undertaking English L2 lessons).

A total of 20 students began the program in April 2018, selected from a larger pool by way of interview, essay and assessment of their overall application. They had a mix of experience overseas with about half having previously undertaken short (1-3 weeks) study abroad activities and around a quarter having never been outside Japan.

Overall, they had an above average motivation for studying English although their English ability itself was not observed as being greater than the average for students their age. As a further indication of this, the students in applying for the program were only required to have achieved the pre-2 level of the Eiken test (Eiken, n.d.). This is a popular test in Japan often taken by high school students and a student who achieves a pass at this level would be deemed to be roughly equivalent to A2 level on the CEFR scale.

Despite the students' modest initial English ability, the program is a highly ambitious initiative with students expected to achieve over and above the

norm at the university. To this end, students are expected to take additional classes and be diligent and motivated towards self-study. Like most universities in Japan, the university in the study follows a two-semester pattern, each lasting for 15 weeks.

In the spring semester, students on the program take an additional 2 English classes as well as a weekly International English Language Testing System (IELTS) mock test for either Listening, Reading or Writing. In the autumn semester there are no mock tests and students take an additional 2 classes (totaling 3 hours) of English per week. During both semesters students are encouraged to visit a study room to speak English at least once a week although not all students do so.

Students on the program are also required to spend 2 weeks during the summer holidays at an intensive language course at a school in the Philippines. This entails a daily total of 8 hours of English learning made up of 6 hours of one-to-one English lessons and 2 hours of self-study. Feedback from students suggests this is a stressful experience but one that provides a good opportunity to practise using English. A moderate increase in students' confidence and willingness to speak English has been observed by us on their return from the Philippines.

The majority of classes taught in the program focus on preparation for the IELTS examination since success in this largely determines whether or not they are able to study abroad. The IELTS test is a four-skills test which is commonly accepted as a qualification for students who wish to study abroad at a university as an exchange student. Although the choice of universities is relatively wide, almost all the exchange universities require at least an IELTS 5.5 overall score, broadly equivalent to a B2 on the CEFR scale, a 605 score

for TOEIC or 65 points on the TOEFL IBT.

Of the 20 students who started, 17 remained in the program on commencement of this study and, at that stage, had an average IELTS score of 4.0.

Japanese Students

Japanese students, on the whole, tend not to be used to thinking critically and reflectively (Suzuki, 2002), which can lead to disadvantage in the more discursive speaking and writing sections of the IELTS test. Swan (2001) notes that, in Japanese classes, "'*What do you think of . . . ?*' discussions can be full of long and painful silences." (p. 309) Despite recent governmental policy efforts to incorporate more discussion and critical thinking in classes (Suzuki, 2002), we have observed that this behaviour is still evident in many Japanese classrooms today.

Furthermore, Japanese students are also more used to a teacher-dominated classroom style with an emphasis on memorization and note-taking and the teacher acting more like a lecturer. Some students may feel initially uncomfortable with the more communication-focused and collaborative environment adopted in study abroad preparation programs such as the SGP. (Swan, 2001 p. 309)

One of the principle problems is that, partly due to the significant differences between the Japanese and English languages, students generally find English to be a tricky subject to learn. (Swan, 2001 p. 296) There is a general sense within Japan that English is "difficult" and it is not unheard of for Japanese teachers of English to say this expressly to their students. This can create tensions in the classroom, especially when dealing with new or unfamiliar materials and can leave students tongue-tied for fear of making a mistake

(Swan, 2001 p. 309)

Students are, however, generally well-behaved and polite in class and will do their best to answer when called on, even if doing so can be uncomfortable. Students are also usually hard-working, becoming used to completing a large number of additional assignments and homework for each class they take from a relatively young age. At high school, for example, students have been reported as averaging between 2 and 6 hours of additional study per night (Stevenson & Nerison-Low, 1998 p. 86)

If a homework assignment is given to university students, our experience is that the vast majority will complete it on time, although incidences of students going above and beyond what is required within those assignments are quite rare.

Literature Review: Measurement of *Awareness* as Opposed to Motivation or Autonomy

Motivation and Awareness

Motivation is seen by many scholars as a key indicator of success in second language acquisition. As second language learning is a process which typically takes years, motivational factors and the maintenance of motivation are particularly pertinent. Certainly, the results of the questionnaire could be interpreted as giving an indication of the motivation level of the individual participants.

In the context of a study abroad preparation course, in particular, the Process Model of L2 Motivation (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998) could have provided a relevant filter through which to view the results. This is especially true since this model was designed to develop, "motivational strategies for the pur-

pose of classroom intervention in second language (L2) education," (p. 43) which was also a primary purpose of us collecting data from the questionnaire and meeting the students individually.

This process model introduces a Preactional Phase (goal setting, intention formation, and the initiation of intention enactment), an Actional Phase (subtask generation and implementation, ongoing appraisal process, action controls), and a Postactional Phase (evaluation of outcomes as opposed to expectations and making inferences for future actions) (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, pp. 47-52). However, to effectively apply this theory to our results would be somewhat difficult as, at the time of the questionnaire, all students could be seen in the "actional phase". Also, if we adapted our interpretation of the results to fit this model, we would be further hindered by the fact that this study was not longitudinal in nature and would be measuring *Preactional Phase* factors (as self-reported by students) and *Actional Phase* factors such as *Subtask Generation and Implementation, Appraisal* and *Action Control.*

To properly apply this process theory of motivation, more questionnaires issued at different stages in the course, including after students had achieved the IELTS score necessary to enter their target universities, would be necessary. As Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) write, "motivation is not so much a relatively constant state but rather a more dynamic entity that changes in time, with the level of effort invested in the pursuit of a particular goal oscillating between regular ups and downs." (p. 45).

Since the 1990s, a plethora of studies attempting to investigate the complex relationship between motivation and English language study by Japanese leaners has been published. A study which provides great insight into this is that of Benson (1991), whose survey of university freshman in Japan has been

cited and built upon by many other studies. Kimura, Nakata and Okumura T. (2001) investigated motivational factors across different demographics in Japan from junior high school age to adults, and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) tested the *L2 Motivational Self System* developed by Dörnyei and Csizór and used the results to make comparisons and contrasts between Japanese, Chinese, and Iranian leaners of English. In short, in this much researched area, the data generated from our questionnaire could hardly make a worthwhile addition to the large amount of high quality literature already available.

Also, in terms of primary motivations (reasons for wanting) to study abroad, our data, as provided by the questionnaire, could not provide anything more than the standard, established answers often given by Japanese students such as those reported by Ono and Piper, (2004) i.e. wanting to improve language ability, enhance future career prospects and experience foreign culture. The various, although largely similar reasons for wanting to study abroad could be investigated through the Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) model as goal setting comprised of antecedents, wishes/hopes, desires and opportunities (p. 47). However, basically, there was not enough variation in the nature and lucidity of these goals to make any worthwhile relative connections between ultimate success and failure of students in the program.

Our questions also touched upon Japanese students' anxiety regarding studying abroad, as was more deeply investigated in the study of Schnickel, Martin and Maruyama (2010). We found students had similar general concerns regarding problems in communication, academic success and daily life such as food and environment. For our purposes, we were not as interested in the specific types of concerns, rather than the existence of concrete con-

cerns itself as proof that students were genuinely thinking about the reality of spending a year abroad and taking university classes in English. Again, we could only best describe this as awareness.

Autonomy and Awareness

Next, closely linked to motivation is the concept of learner autonomy in language learning, and we believe that this is a big part of what we are choosing to call awareness. The questionnaire attempted to measure students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and the amount and style of independent study.

Phil Benson, building upon the works of pioneers in the field such as Holec (1981), offers a definition of autonomy as, "the capacity to take control of one's learning" (2013, p. 58) which should include three key aspects which are, "learning management, cognitive processes and learning content" (2013, p. 58).

Attempting to make a more practical description and guide to learner autonomy in the context of formal language education, Little writes:

The development of autonomy in language learning is governed by three basic pedagogical principles:

・learner involvement－engaging learners to share responsibility for the learning process (the affective and the metacognitive dimensions);

・learner reflection－helping learners to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning (the metacognitive dimensions);

・appropriate target language use－using the target language as the principal medium of language learning (the communicative and the

metacognitive dimensions). (p. 2)

While the third aspect, *appropriate target language use,* is a key component of the SGP English classes and IELTS preparation, it was not represented in our questionnaire. A number of questions directly referred to the concepts of *learner involvement* and *learner reflection.* However, for the purpose of our questionnaire, we were not purely concerned with language learning, but all of the steps and forethought necessary to study abroad.

Concerning cultural aspects, in that we are dealing exclusively with Japanese learners, the work of Littlewood (1999), which posits the concept of learner autonomy existing on a continuum between *proactive autonomy* and *reactive autonomy,* was instrumental in the formation of our interpretation of our questionnaire. In that students have entered the program and have been told that they need to achieve of IELTS 5.5 or higher within a semi-fixed time schedule to qualify to study abroad, *reactive autonomy* would seem the most relevant. Of this, Littlewood writes, "This is the kind of autonomy that does not create its own directions but once a direction has been initiated, enables learners to organise their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal" (1999, p. 75). However, other aspects of the course require *proactive autonomy* such as researching their destination university and selecting an appropriate faculty to study in and preparing for this adequately. Analysing our questionnaire results and classifying which aspects would count as either proactive or reactive, and the students propensities in each could also yield valuable insights.

Truly, developing learner autonomy must be a key goal of the SGP program. It is a valid concept for students to be familiar with, and a key attribute for stu-

dents to develop not only in preparation for studying abroad, but for success while studying abroad, and especially as a way to maintain and continue to develop their English ability upon returning.

Why Measure Awareness as a Composite Construct?

In summary, our overall goal in compiling this research was to connect responses to the questionnaire with the success of the students in successfully reaching their IELTS goal and successfully applying to one of our exchange partner institutions. In doing this, we hoped to find patterns, and ideally, early indicators that without some intervention a student was at risk of failing to achieve their goals. Also, we hoped to gain insights into the thoughts and practices of successful students in the hope of instilling these attributes in future participants.

After examining the literature regarding motivation and autonomy in language learning, we found that we could not quite find a model to match our goals and the data set that we had obtained. So, narrowing our scope, and focusing on our overall goal of improving our program, combining the elements of motivation and autonomy mentioned above, we settled on the term *awareness* as a composite construct in order to best serve our individual purposes and to help us more insightfully analyse our data.

In the case of this study, we therefore see *awareness* as encapsulating motivation and autonomy but, also, being different from both. It is a term and a construct that we apply to mean the consideration, knowledge and self-directed acquisition of knowledge, self-reflection and diligence over time that we have come to see is required of students to succeed in the SGP.

It was through this newly-conceived lens that we felt we had the best

chance of both understanding our program and its students and subsequently shaping and moulding the structure and educational philosophy of the program in future years.

Research Questions

In this study, we set out to answer the following questions:

1) To what extent do students on the program demonstrate awareness about their individual strengths and weaknesses?
2) To what extent do students on the program demonstrate the ability to reflect on their achievement and the effectiveness of their 2-week study abroad in the Philippines?
3) To what extent do students on the program demonstrate awareness about the study abroad options available to them and what they need to achieve in order to study abroad?
4) To what extent can a link be identified between higher levels of awareness and achieving a 5.5 on the IELTS test?
5) To what extent can a link be identified between higher levels of awareness and achieving the goal of long term study abroad?
6) To what extent do three detailed case studies help us to better understand the link between awareness and success?

* It should be noted that questions 4) and 5) are very similar and very much influence one another but they are not exactly the same. This distinction will be discussed in more detail later.

Method

The first stage of the study was the collection of the data which was accomplished through the use of a questionnaire that students completed in class. A decision was made to write the questionnaire in Japanese as opposed to English and to have students write their answers in Japanese as well. There were two predominant reasons for this. Firstly, it was felt that students would be more capable of understanding and adequately responding to the questions in their native language. Secondly, since the class in which they completed it was an English class, we wanted to differentiate the activity as much as possible from other elements of the class.

Shortly after completion of the questionnaire, interviews were held with students to discuss their responses and to clarify any elements that were unclear. Students were given the opportunity to speak in Japanese or English in these interviews and to develop their responses where possible. Efforts were made to be consistent with questioning across all the interviews and for minimal leading on the part of the interviewers in order to avoid confirmation bias.

The questionnaires were subsequently anonymised by replacing the students' names with numbers generated at random. Responses were quantified by way of a scale generated prior to the completing of the questionnaires. Students were assigned scores in the four sections as well as an overall score and these were recorded in a password protected Excel spreadsheet. Where the two authors disagreed over an individual score, an average was taken of the two scores. This occurred several times.

Preliminary analysis of these scores indicated a relatively wide range, although it was not possible to fully examine any correlation with success in

studying abroad at this stage since the program was still in process and students were still regularly sitting IELTS tests.

As this was a new program at the university, there was little in the way of concrete deadlines or criteria for when students would have been deemed to be either *in* or *out* of the program. This presented an issue for us in that we needed a tangible cut-off date in order to analyse the data against success in studying abroad. To circumvent this issue, we settled on the end of the academic year as a reference point.

Originally, we had planned to separate the students into two groups, "Studying Abroad" and "Not Studying Abroad". Since some students were indecisive and due to the absence of clear criteria as to whether or not students were able to continue with the program, it was decided to include a third category, "Maybe Studying Abroad" for students who had neither achieved a place by the end of the academic year nor formally dropped out.

The group labels '**A**', '**B**' and '**C**' were then adopted as a more practicable shorthand. '**A**' represented students who had made an explicit decision not to undertake long term study abroad. '**B**' represented students who were still planning to undertake long term study abroad but had not yet met the requirements to do so or whose decision was unclear. '**C**' represented students who had achieved the requisite criteria and had submitted a study abroad application.

We both had prior experience of the students and were working alone so it was necessary to be conscious of any potential bias in our interpretation of students and the data. Since the data was confidential, this limited our ability to share it beyond ourselves or to

"[voice our] prejudices and assumptions so that they can be considered

openly and challenged" (Norris 1997 p. 174). As a result, we tried to discuss any potential bias amongst ourselves and to reexamine the data where it was felt that this was a concern.

Results and Analysis

1. Evidence of Awareness of Strengths and Weaknesses

Students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses was assessed through five yes/no questions, designed to examine the triangular relationship between three key areas: their individual IELTS section scores, their own perception of their strengths and weaknesses and the study that they were actually doing. This section was scored out of five with one point being assigned to each question. Where the two reviewers differed in opinion as to whether to award a point, a half point was awarded. Scoring for this section ranged from 0 to 5.

The criteria were as follows:

1) Are they doing any study?
2) Does their amount of study reflect the distance from their target IELTS score?
3) Is their study balanced towards their self-perceived strengths and weaknesses? (Students were asked to identify these earlier in the questionnaire)
4) Is their study balanced towards their actual IELTS section scores?
5) Is their study likely to be effective?

Table 1

Student Awareness Scores for Strengths and Weaknesses

Not studying Abroad (A)	**Maybe Studying Abroad (B)**	**Definitely Studying Abroad (C)**
0	2	1
1	4	2.5
0	1.5	3.5
0		4.5
2		
0		
2		
2		
3		
4		
μ=1.4	**μ=2.5**	**μ=2.88**

The overall average score was 1.94 points out of 5 (σ=1.5). Group A had a mean score of 1.4 points (σ=1.43). Group B had a mean score of 2.5 points (σ=1.32). Group C had a mean score of 2.88 (σ=1.49).

Whilst the dataset is small, there are a few observations that are worth noting. Firstly, whilst the Group B and C scores are quite similar, there is a large difference observable in the lowest group. Indeed, within that group, there are four students who were doing no study at all.

It is possible and arguably likely that at least some of these students had already given up on studying abroad. Interestingly, at the questionnaire stage, all but two students on the program had reaffirmed their commitment and intimated that they were still attempting to study abroad. Given that only one student in Group A had achieved a qualifying IELTS score (and so might have a reason to stop studying), this data appears to show a discrepancy between what students were telling us about their commitment and the reality of how much time and effort they were dedicating to study.

Additionally, since scoring any points at all is contingent on doing some study (and therefore scoring one point in the first question), it is perhaps also worth examining the data of only the students who were doing at least some study separately.

Removing the students not doing any study at all from Group A brings all the group averages much closer together. Group A students scored 1.67 out of 4, B group students scored just 1.5 out of 4 and C group students scored 1.88 out of 4 on average from the remaining questions (although one student from Group C had already achieved a qualifying score and may have reduced their study).

Taking the above into consideration, it does seem clear overall that students in general were either not doing enough study or that the study they were doing was not well enough targeted to the areas they most needed to work on to achieve their target scores in the IELTS test.

2. Evidence of Ability to Reflect on Philippines Experience

Students' ability to reflect on their study abroad experience was assessed through their answers to five open questions. Students were scored on a scale from 0-5 for each question resulting in a total score of 25. This score was subsequently divided by 5 to give a final score out of 5 points. These scores were recorded to 1 decimal place. Where the two reviewers differed in opinion as to the score, the average score was recorded for that question (e.g. if Reviewer A gave a 3 and Review B gave a 4, a score of 3.5 was recorded).

The scoring scale was as follows:

Table 2
Philippines Experience Scoring Scale

Score	Description
0	No awareness/ failure to respond
1	Brief nonspecific (e.g. *English Improved*)
2	Not specific but mention of individual skill or ability including grammar / vocabulary / course structure / learning environment
3	Slightly specific mention of skill / ability / test section / course structure / learning outcome / learning environment
4	More detailed response mentioning skill / ability / test section / course structure / learning outcome / learning environment
5	Very detailed response mentioning skill / ability / test section / course structure / learning outcome / learning environment and analysis of personal learning outcome

The questions were as follows:

1) Please describe your experience in the Philippines
2) What new things did you learn?
3) What English skills did you improve?
4) Is there anything that you wished you had been able to improve that you couldn't improve?
5) What was the reason that you could not improve this?

Table 3

Student Awareness Scores for Philippines Study Abroad Experience

Not studying Abroad (A)	**Maybe Studying Abroad (B)**	**Definitely Studying Abroad (C)**
2.2	2.8	3.3
1	3.6	4
2.3	2.8	2.4
1.4		3.6
3.8		
3.8		
2.7		
2.9		
2.5		
4		
μ=2.66	**μ=3.07**	**μ=3.33**

The overall average score was 2.89 points out of 5 (σ=0.88). Group A had a mean score of 2.66 points (σ=0.95). Group B had a mean score of 3.07 points (σ=0.57). Group C had a mean score of 3.33 (σ=0.8).

In general, the students' scores in this section were quite closely grouped together with no individual student achieving above a 4.0. One possible explanation for this is that the scores are scaled and then averaged as opposed to the binary data found in research question one. Averaging non-binary data may have tended to push scores towards the middle of the scale.

There is, however, a clear increase in scores from the 2.66 average in Group A, through 3.07 in Group B and finally up to 3.33 in Group C. This data set would therefore suggest a link between students being more aware and achieving their goal of studying abroad. Those who provided more detailed analysis and reflection of their learning experiences are more likely to be found in group C than in the other two groups.

Further inspection of the data provides some interesting findings. Of the

three high scores in Group A, all belong to students who were not prevented from studying abroad simply by their test scores (the case for the majority of this group). In fact, the highest scoring student in Group A, Student 11, was the only student to achieve a qualifying score to study abroad but elect not to do so. Had this student decided differently, he/she would have been placed in Group C and the correlational link would have been more pronounced.

Additionally, the data generated within the confines of research question two provides a more general insight which may warrant further study. Students 9 and 13 both demonstrated very high awareness about the trip to the Philippines and each dropped out of the program immediately upon their return (just after commencing this study and completing the questionnaires). Both appear to have reflected quite deeply on their experiences and perhaps decided that study abroad was not for them. They subsequently made a clear and expedient decision not to continue with the program.

3. Evidence of Awareness of Study Abroad Options and Requirements

Students' awareness of their study abroad options was assessed in two ways. The first established whether they had chosen a specific university and course, whether they were aware of the entry requirements and whether they had given adequate consideration for those decisions. Students had previously been given access to a list of exchange partner universities and their requirements.

For the first assessment, students were firstly given a point for selecting a course and university. They were then given two points for a clear reason or one point for a vague reason for the course element and then the same for the university element for a maximum total of five points.

The second assessment established whether or not students had thought about the likely challenges involved in studying abroad in a foreign country. To establish this, they were asked two questions.

- *Other than IELTS study, what English skills do you think you need to improve to keep up with classes and function in daily life while studying abroad?*
- *Other than English ability, what other skills or knowledge do you think you need to improve to prepare to study abroad?*

The purpose of these questions was to separate those students who had clearly thought about and researched the long-term study abroad experience from those with vaguer notions of wanting to study abroad or travel.

The scoring for the second assessment gave one or two points for each of the two questions. For each, one point was given for a relevant but brief or non-specific answer, whereas a specific, detailed answer was awarded two points.

A final bonus point was available for any specific reference to the overseas university environment, such as a different classroom learning style. The purpose of the bonus point was to try to differentiate perceptions of long term study abroad as a study experience as opposed to simply a travel or life experience. A total of five points was awarded for this assessment.

Combining the two five-point assessments, there was a combined total of ten points for this section. Where the two reviewers differed in opinion as to the score, the average score was recorded for that question (e.g. if Reviewer A gave a 2 and Review B gave a 1, a score of 1.5 was recorded).

Table 4

Student Awareness Scores for Study Abroad Options and Requirements

Not studying Abroad (A)	**Maybe Studying Abroad (B)**	**Definitely Studying Abroad (C)**
1	2.5	3.5
2	3	7
2	7	9
4		8
0		
3		
5.5		
5.5		
5		
4		
μ=3.2	**μ=4.17**	**μ=6.88**

The overall average score was 4.24 points out of 10 (σ=2.51). Group A had a mean score of 3.2 points (σ=1.92). Group B had a mean score of 4.17 points (σ=2.47). Group C had a mean score of 6.88 (σ=2.39).

What is clear to see from the data is that the scores of those who successfully achieved study abroad places were considerably higher, with 75% of this group scoring 7 or above out of 10. Interestingly, one student in this group scored much lower, even below the average of Group B. In fact, this student had not thought at all about which university to study at, scoring zero for the first section. Ultimately, the student went on to choose a university with lower-than-standard entry requirements, giving this as a reason for the choice.

Despite this outlier bringing it down, the average score for Group C remains considerably higher than for the other two groups, with three of the four scores in the group representing the highest three scores in the survey for this section. This suggests that this data could potentially be a useful indicator of the likelihood of success for students in future programs.

Although the dataset is small, it would seem that students who have a clear idea of the university and course that they wish to pursue and the challenges associated with that will have a better chance of ultimately achieving a study abroad place there.

4. Overall Awareness and IELTS Score

An IELTS overall score of 5.5 is considered important in the program since this score essentially ensures the availability of a study abroad place for that student, although he/she may decide not to take it. Whilst it is possible to study abroad with a 5.0 (as one student did), there are significantly fewer opportunities to do this and acceptance is on a case-by-case basis.

IELTS scores alone do not, however, indicate a success as far as the university is concerned. A student is deemed to be "successful" in the program if he/she undertakes long term study abroad, regardless of the IELTS score that is achieved. We have therefore decided to examine this in detail in research question 5.

Nevertheless, we decided that IELTS attainment and awareness was an area worth briefly exploring and so split the students into two groups (those who achieved an IELTS Overall score of at least 5.5 and those who did not) in order to examine the data.

Table 5

Student Overall Awareness Scores Grouped by IELTS Score

No IELTS 5.5	**IELTS 5.5+**
3.2	12
4	13.5
4.3	14.9
5.4	16.1
5.8	
6.8	
10.2	
10.4	
10.5	
7.8	
μ=6.84	**μ=14.13**

This table illustrates students' overall awareness score (from a maximum total of twenty points, comprised of the five points for each of research questions 1 and 2 and the 10 points from research question 3).

A clear distinction in average awareness score is evident. Those in the IELTS 5.5+ group had an average awareness score of 14.13 out of 20 whereas the other group managed only 6.84 on average.

It appears therefore that there is a strong link between students who scored highly for awareness and in their achieving this milestone in the IELTS test. The precise reasons for this would need significant further investigation and are not the major focus of this study.

It is also not entirely clear whether it is the awareness or the achievement that comes first. It may be that aware students actually score better or that only students who feel they have a chance of success go to the effort of making themselves aware. Equally, students with low awareness scores may have already given up. We can, however, conclude that, at least in principle, the more

able students are also more aware.

5. Overall Awareness and Study Abroad

Since the goal of the program is to give students the opportunity to pursue long term study abroad, the impact that awareness has on this was the primary area of interest in this research. Once again, there is clear evidence of more awareness the closer a student gets to studying abroad.

Table 6
Student Overall Awareness Scores Grouped by Study Abroad Status

Not studying Abroad (A)	**Maybe Studying Abroad (B)**	**Definitely Studying Abroad (C)**
3.2	7.3	7.8
4	10.6	13.5
4.3	11.3	14.9
5.4		16.1
5.8		
6.8		
10.2		
10.4		
10.5		
12		
μ=7.26	**μ=9.73**	**μ=13.08**

This table also illustrates students' overall awareness score up to a combined maximum total of twenty points. Again, it is comprised of the five points for each of research questions 1 and 2 and the 10 points from in research question 3.

Group A had an average awareness score of 7.26 out of 20, Group B had 9.73 and Group C had 13.08. If the groups are examined more closely, some interesting details emerge. The range of scores in Group A is wide (σ=3.22) and,

thus, it is telling to look at the specifics of those at each end of the scale.

Four students in this group scored over 10 points and three of them chose at a very late stage not to study abroad, one of whom who had an IELTS qualifying score. Interestingly, of the lowest four awareness scores in this group, three (3.2, 4 and 5.4) belonged to students who also took a long time to decide not to pursue studying abroad. The two students in the middle (5.8 and 6.8) both decided to drop out of the program immediately after the questionnaires and interviews.

One possible explanation for the range of situations in Group A is that those with very little awareness showed little evidence of the motivation to study abroad but also a lack of reflection on their chances of being successful so did not quickly drop out. Those in the middle also had little invested in the program (so demonstrated relatively low awareness) but, crucially, had enough awareness to know that either their chances of achieving a qualifying score were low or that they did not wish to study abroad. As a result they made a quick decision to drop out.

Finally, it may be that the most aware students in the group knew more about what was required and their own strengths and weaknesses and so were more likely to stick with the program to try and improve their English to the extent that they could achieve a study abroad place. They only left the program at a late stage when they were unable to do so.

In fact. the higher scoring members of Group A who left the program at a late stage had similar scores to those in Group B (average＝9.73, σ＝2.14). This might be expected since there is not a great difference between these groups. Both spent a protracted period of time in the program but did not achieve a study abroad place by December, the only difference being that

Group B students opted to continue with the program into the new year[1]. Group C students have a very high average score of 13.08. In practice this means that these students mostly had very high awareness of the university they wanted to attend, the course they wanted to pursue, their strengths and weaknesses and the type of and amount of study required to bridge the gap between their existing level and that required to secure a place.

It is worth noting that these students did not begin the program with the highest IELTS scores but that their motivation and commitment to self-improvement was observed to be strong from an early stage. Given that the success of the program is determined by the number of students in Group C, it is certainly feasible from the data that increasing future students' awareness scores to the levels found in this group may result in more students studying abroad.

6. Case Studies

In addition to the more quantitative analysis employed above, it was felt that a brief qualitative case study from each group may help to provide additional context. We elected to examine the student in each group who fell nearest to the group mean, hoping that this would be close to representative. The data for each of the three students can be found in the table below.

Table 7
Case Studies of Three Students

Group	Student	IELTS June*	IELTS Sept*	IELTS Oct/Nov*	June-Sept Change	Sept-Nov Change	June-Nov Change	Awareness Score	Study Abroad?
A	**9**	17	17.5	N/A	+0.5	N/A	N/A	6.8	**NO**
B	**10**	19	18.5	18.5	−0.5	0	−0.5	10.6	**MAYBE**
C	**5**	17	19	19.5	+2	+0.5	+2.5	13.5	**YES**

* Sum total of band scores for all four sections

Student 9 began the program with an English level somewhere towards the middle of the group. This student displayed early enthusiasm despite shyness in group speaking activities and visited the study room quite regularly to talk one-to-one with the teacher. The student saw modest improvement in IELTS score between June and September.

In general, therefore, progress was relatively good with the English learning elements of the course and the student appeared reasonably motivated to improve his/her English, at least in class. This was in contrast to the choosing of a university, with the student having to be repeatedly cajoled into making decisions and meeting deadlines. The student was also not doing any English study outside class (scoring 0 out of 5 in this section). We were unsure about the student's genuine commitment to long term study abroad for this reason.

In other areas of the questionnaire, the student scored very highly for awareness of experiences in the Philippines (3.8 out of 5) but poorly in other sections, notably scoring just three out of ten for the study abroad questions, having neither chosen a study abroad university nor a course.

In fact, the student dropped out of the program almost immediately after completing the questionnaire and interview. Various reasons were given, the sum total of which being that the student simply did not have the motivation

to study abroad and that the reluctance to make decisions and experiences in the Philippines had indeed been part of that.

Student 10 also began the program with an English level somewhere towards the middle of the group. Although generally positive, this student had a strong tendency to speak in Japanese and appeared to dislike speaking in English, perhaps due to embarrassment or nerves. Homework assignments were completed but class participation was relatively weak with frequent Japanese being used and frequent reoccurrences of the same mistakes on assignments, despite instruction, explanation and other students improving in those specific areas (indicating this was likely not an overall teaching issue).

The student appeared to have little confidence in his/her English ability although a reasonable amount of self-study was reported around the time of the questionnaires (the student scored 4 out of 5 for this section). Evidence of this study however quickly faded away as the Autumn semester progressed.

The student had chosen a target university and course but appeared to have put little thought into the decision. Furthermore, given the admissions requirements, achieving a place there with his/her English proficiency and amount of study was very unlikely. The student seemed not really to appreciate this or to be lacking in motivation or understanding of how to change this situation. The combined score of three out of ten for awareness of study abroad options illustrates the limited amount of consideration the student had invested.

The student opted to continue within the program but at the time of writing still does not have a clear goal of where and what to study and our observation is that English improvement appears to have stalled. It is our view that this student has a general desire to undertake long term study abroad but either

does not really believe that he/she can improve to the requisite level or lacks the real motivation to do so. The student appears to have had some awareness at various stages in the process but has not been able to act decisively upon it.

Student 5 entered the program with an English level below average compared to the other students and with no experience of studying abroad. The student was, however, evidently very motivated from the outset, frequently asking questions about both the English language and study abroad where he/she felt that his/her knowledge was lacking.

Further evidence of this student doing what we might call *building awareness* was in his/her consultation with older, more experienced students from the first intake of the program and from university staff. The student also showed significant evidence of doing research into study abroad options, courses and requirements at an early stage.

The student showed an impressive awareness and ability to reflect on the short-term study abroad trip to the Philippines, scoring four out of five for this section. By the time of the questionnaires, the student, through research and consultation, had also managed to develop a very clear picture of the university and course at which he/she wished to study and gave clear reasons for wanting to do so, scoring a full five out of five for this section.

Motivation was evident in the student's self-study in that the quantity was high but there was a definite lack of awareness in terms of how these efforts should have best been directed. The student scored only 2.5 out of 5 in this section of the questionnaire. However, upon being made aware of this, he/she clearly acted upon the feedback given in the interviews as subsequent study was much better targeted.

Notably, the student showed a very large improvement in overall IELTS

score, very likely as a result of these efforts, and this was enough for the student to meet the entrance requirements for the chosen university. A successful application was subsequently made, and the student will soon commence long-term study abroad.

Limitations of this Study

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the sample size is small, so it is difficult to infer much in the way of patterns even within this specific context. In this case, we were constricted not only by a limited pool of students to assess but also in our capacity as researchers, having to conduct this research by ourselves and alongside the numerous other tasks carried out by university teachers running this type of program.

Furthermore, as discussed in the case of motivation, there are significant difficulties in adequately measuring any type of awareness across the span of a year. Logistically, it was only possible to quantitatively measure awareness at a fixed point in time (in the questionnaires). As can be seen, particularly in the case of Student 10, our data does not really allow for fluctuations throughout the year. These might come in the form of changes in motivation which can have a direct impact on the amount of research and self-study students do or in their self-reflection, both key elements of our composite construct of awareness. Such measurements can also fall short where students change plans, such as their target university or course, since a large part of the previous knowledge and awareness they have developed will no longer apply to the new context.

Finally, although we have done our best to more clearly define the awareness paradigm within this specific context, measuring this both quantitatively

through the questionnaires and contextually through observation and interviews proved to be very difficult and is far from an exact science. The above notwithstanding, we both strongly agree that the awareness levels as measured within this study are at least broadly congruous with our combined experiences of working with these students for the last year.

Conclusion

As far as self-study is concerned, the data indicated that there were not especially large differences between students and that even students who were studying a lot were not necessarily channeling that study as effectively as they could have been. Students in general lacked awareness about the type of study that they needed to be doing.

Students' awareness in terms of their reflection on the Philippines trip showed a weak correlation with success but was perhaps most illuminating in the case of the two students who showed high awareness surrounding this experience and who quickly dropped out. This suggests that the trip may act as quite a useful preview of what studying abroad in an English-speaking environment is like and may build students' awareness to the extent that they are more capable of deciding whether they are either motivated or capable enough to study abroad. Furthermore, utilising such questionnaires in the future may prove to be a useful diagnostic tool for teachers to measure students' motivation and capacity.

The analysis of students' selection of a university and course as well as their awareness of what long term study abroad is likely to involve proved insightful. There was a strong correlation between students who scored well in these areas and success in the overall program. Increasing awareness in these two

areas certainly appears to be a sensible focus with future students.

Whilst there is a strong correlation between overall awareness and IELTS score, in this specific context it is attaining the goal of studying abroad that is the more relevant consideration, especially given the existence of a student with a qualifying score who elected not to study abroad and would therefore be deemed unsuccessful within this program.

Fortunately, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the IELTS requirements for entry into study abroad programs, the correlation between awareness and studying abroad is similar to the correlation with IELTS scores. Since it is true that those with higher awareness scores are more likely to study abroad, increasing awareness in future students may indeed lead to greater program success, perhaps particularly if raising awareness is targeted at students like those in Group B.

Additionally, as was seen in the overall awareness scores for Group A, there may be ancillary benefits in improving awareness for students who are unlikely to study abroad. Encouraging these students to think more deeply about their abilities, study patterns and the realities of the program may help to avoid situations where students coast along without making decisions, occupying limited teaching and logistical resources in the process which could otherwise be directed towards students more motivated and able to study abroad.

Application for Future Iterations of the Program

In this year's program, some successful students came from a long way "off the pace" to achieve their goals, a feat that their initial scores alone would not have predicted occurring. Equally, some students who appeared to be on track ended up missing their goals when their early test scores suggested oth-

erwise. With a group of new students of varying ability levels, the vast majority of whom require significant improvement in order to reach a goal within a tight time frame, it seems that analysis of test score patterns alone is likely to prove inconclusive.

As a result, one way in which measurement of awareness might help in future is in identifying potential 'problem students' at an earlier stage in the program. The research suggests that examining students' awareness levels early on may help in highlighting potential interventions or changes in strategy that could be adopted by the university. Since all universities have limited time and resources, being able to better allocate them to the students who need them most and in the most effective way possible is likely to positively impact the overall success of the program.

Furthermore, efforts can be made to incorporate activities and procedures designed to increase the overall level of awareness in future iterations of the program. In doing so, it is hoped that more effective and extensive self-study can be encouraged and that the more labour-intensive practice of having to spoon-feed students with what they need to succeed can be reduced.

Some practical examples of this might be:

- Encouraging students to research and choose a specific university and course earlier in the program and ensuring that they are fully aware of the requirements for entry
- Introduction of self-study plans with tangible goals and needs-based activities
- More frequent meetings with students to discuss their progress and self-study plans

- More peer-correction and self-evaluation of writing and speaking tasks to increase self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- More candid explanation to students of their chances of success or failure with reference to concrete examples from previous years for comparison (reference to required study hours etc.)
- A greater emphasis on the amount of self-study hours required and, in particular, the areas on which these should be concentrated
- Less emphasis on test scores in communication with students and in their periodical university evaluation (grading, for example)

Note

1) Timetabling also impacted on some students' ability to continue

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